

Superstition - 1937

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People, Places and Things

By Pauline Cobb Griffin

Who in the South has not heard secret on at their death to some medical patient which had been placed. There are dozens and dozens of of the "kunjeress" of the negroes member of their family and it became there to lessen or cut short the these quaint superstitions that of long ago, their superstitions and came a precious heritage. pains of childbirth. During a have come down from year to year their implicit belief in the work- Any darkie could tell you that number of years in general practice, which still have many faithful ad- ngs of spells and enchantments? night sweats could be cured with tice, he encountered many cures herents. They give one an idea Education, good wages, automo-the simple expedient of placing a and "kunjeres" among both the of the workings of the brain of the biles, good roads and other ele-pan of cold water under the bed, blacks and whites. illiterate type of persons during nents have changed the fiber of and chills could be cured if the Most of our superstitions also the early days and they portray people whose background not so person effected tied a knot in a originated with the old-time South-ong since was the mysterious cotton string for every chill suffer-ern negroes. Every one of them negro better than any artist's dark African jungle. ed, the string then being tied a-knew that the left hind foot of a brush.

Modern negroes are familiar around a persimmon tree by the pa-graveyard rabbit caught at mid-night on Saturday night, carried with modern medicine, as was evident who, after performing the rite, walked away and did not look in the pocket, would surely bring denced by the long line of them formed in front of the county phy-back. luck. No negro would willingly sician's office several weeks ago Asafoetida worn around the touch a hoot owl for, although they when typhoid vaccine was being dispensed. They have their own diseases and a dime worn around the wrist to cure rheumatism. There were several other remedies need of the surgeon's knife in op-erative cases. There are, however, for rheumatism, which was prevalent among the negroes. One was a sprinkling of the old-time ne-lent among the negroes. Some younger ones who have not de-n the pocket; another was to catch fishing worms, boil them down to common knowledge that there is a paste and rub the part affected; a "kunjere doctor" in Spartanburg and still another cure was to swallow one pokeberry three times a day. Who comes to Morganton at frequent intervals to banish the ail-lay.

A remedy for warts was to steal a greasy dish rag, pick the wart and get a drop of blood, take the rag into the woods and bury it and the wart would disappear. Who has not heard that one must never start a journey or a piece of work on Friday and that a woman visitor should not be allowed to enter the house on Monday or Friday mornings before anyone else? If she does come bad luck will follow unless she is accompanied by a man, in which case the spell is broken.

Many of the old negro women desired the warts to "go on" some-where with which they worked dire spells on one another. These bags tied under the house of the person sometimes contained a weird col-he warts were "wished on." Mad dog bites could be cured by ing a dried toad, a dried snake wrapping a moonstone or what skin, an ordinary nail, fingernails, was called a "mad stone" into the toenails, a feather, little scraps of bandage. To cure a goiter, one had to catch a live toad, rub the things. This bag was usually carried with it, then release the To carry a hoe through the house is a sign of death to a member of the family and should a spade be carried through the house disaster is imminent. To jured," it was just simply "just of these going back beyond wash clothes between Christmas too bad" for the person. There were cures for these curses, how- ters were supposed to be very popular in Shakespeare's time when love phil- and New Year's day is to wash a member of the family away. The ever, and there was an unfallible tent. These were put in food and howling of a dog presages death, way of telling who had worked these or she who ate of them would as does the flight of a bird, especially a bat, into the house.

and few were allowed to see it. If "Love powders" were common member of the family and should the bag was left for a time under with negroes and with a number of illiterates as well, the origin house disaster is imminent. To jured," it was just simply "just of these going back beyond wash clothes between Christmas too bad" for the person. There were cures for these curses, how- ters were supposed to be very popular in Shakespeare's time when love phil- and New Year's day is to wash a member of the family away. The ever, and there was an unfallible tent. These were put in food and howling of a dog presages death, way of telling who had worked these or she who ate of them would as does the flight of a bird, especially a bat, into the house.

per of needles under the doorstep who placed them there. My hus-

and the first person who came to and who practiced medicine for a borrow an article was the one who number of years among all classes had worked the spell.

In the South there are many persons who can recall old women to gravely refuse and admit that hungry. If the right hand itches, who could talk out fire. No one knew nothing about them. Many you will shake hands with a stranger knew how it was done but the old times also, he said, he could see, if the left hand either money women were supposed to pass the an axe under the bed of an obstet- or a letter is on the way.

If a red bird flutters around the house, an unexpected visitor will of people frequently had requests come before night or if the dish In the South there are many persons who can recall old women to gravely refuse and admit that hungry. If the right hand itches, who could talk out fire. No one knew nothing about them. Many you will shake hands with a stranger knew how it was done but the old times also, he said, he could see, if the left hand either money women were supposed to pass the an axe under the bed of an obstet- or a letter is on the way.

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Superstitious Are Robbed

"Charm" Merchants Get Rich At Expense Of Negroes

By T. H. Alexander

ONE has not really had any stirring excitement unless he has been in the midst of a murder committed by a negro upon the person of another negro. The scene, of course, must be laid in the South where the participants are farm negroes, having all the superstition and ignorance of farm negroes.

We had a murderer, or perhaps I should say just a killing, at Bankrupt Manor not long ago. There T. H. Alexander



ghostly habiliments, leaving in the morning a jelly-like substance which one must quickly throw into the fire. When this burns, it will be the last of that old ghost and he dies. will be laid forever.

This technique came straight from Africa with the early slaves and has remained on these shores since. It is African witchcraft widely believed among the laboring classes of Southern negroes. I was seriously asked by one of the harassed members of the family where

this killing took place to procure a new horseshoe for this purpose. We think we know the negro in the South but I doubt if many white men ever understood the heart of so simple a creature as a farm negro. Harris Dickson, the noted Mississippi writer, once took a simple Mississippi negro to a circus. He paid his way for his own amusement to see how the country negro would be impressed. Mr. Dickson was sure the elephants would impress the negro more than anything else, or perhaps the monkeys.

And, at that, this mumbo-jumbo is no worse than the superstition of the early Christians of a large part of Europe that witches flew by night, or that some souls were earth-bound and became vampires.

"Yes, suh," said the Mississippi negro, "dey wuz sho' wonderful, dem elephants and dem monkeys wuz sho' funny. Hee, hee, hee. But dem camuels, dey wuz the most wonderful thing in de circus."

"What was so wonderful about the camels?" asked the puzzled Mississippian.

"Why, suh," said the negro, "dem camuels wuz the most wonderful things I ever seed. Mr. Dickson, dey sho' has got a noble smell—dem camuels had the most noble smell I ever smelled in my life!"

There is no need to enter into the causes of it except to say that there was a feminine motive. It took place in my tenant house and the lethal weapon—how by night, or that some souls were earth-bound and became vampires. I used to overwork that word in my police reporter days—was abats who sucked the blood of the shotgun which unhappily belonged to me. It had been loaned for hunting purposes so long ago that I had forgotten its existence. That mysterious force known as "the law" now has it for court purposes and plays, "Dracula," was founded on the net result of the affray is that I am short a farm hand and a shotgun.

I have more than once protested in this space against the commercialization of the superstitions of the Southern negro of the farm and laboring classes. There are men in Chicago and New York who are negro member of the community will go within a mile of that ill-fated tenant house, because it is widely known that the ghost of a murdered negro is induced to send such sums as \$1 and \$2 to a voodoo mail to lay the ghost. The most ambitious was to place a new horse-shoe over the door of the tenant "Holy Oil," which is nothing more than refuse oil drained from an automobile. The Dream Books and Numbers books which foster the distant from the murder the ghost numbers racket are bad enough, but of what they call "the deceased" "Magic Parchment" at \$3.75 per square foot—it being a high grade paper which costs points pointing upward. When the ghost of the murdered man comes worse. Yet each year from the cotton fields of the South there go millions of dollars earned by black folks by the ghost was ever known to pass a lark on the points and stays there while the pockets of conscienceless racketeers in the cities of America.

The negro members of the community have made various efforts to lay the ghost. The most ambitious was to place a new horse-shoe over the door of the tenant house. You must have a new horse-shoe or the scheme will fail. Then come the Dream Books and Numbers books which foster the ghost of the murdered man comes worse. Yet each year from the cotton fields of the South there go millions of dollars earned by black folks by the ghost was ever known to pass a lark on the points and stays there while the pockets of conscienceless racketeers in the cities of America.

For \$1. the ignorant can buy a